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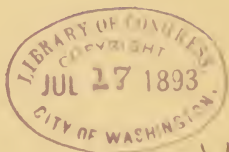


THE OTHER SIDE

An Historic Poem

BY

VIRGINIA FRAZER BOYLE
" "



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TO
CONFEDERATE SOLDIERS
LIVING AND DEAD
AND TO
THE WOMEN OF THE SOUTH
This Poem
IS DEDICATED



PREFACE

THE literature of a country is a many-sided polygon, upon whose polished surfaces is reflected the internal structure of its peoples.

From the womb of literature is born the history of a nation, the outer record of an inner chronicle of heredity and environment.

Contemporaneous history cannot be written, and the statement of such an existence stamps the production at once as false and partisan.

Contemporaneous literature, however, in whatever state, is the logbook by which the historical mariner can steer off the shoals of narrowness and lift above the fogs of sectionalism the many phases of an heterogeneous people.

America has no history ; the Republic is too new for crystallization ; but its transition bears testimony to two distinct eras, born of the same impulse, bearing toward the same goal, but differing in results.

Success tells its own story. That there is another side is too often forgotten in the pæans for the victorious ; but victor and vanquished have

the privilege, nay, it should be urged that it is their duty, in this united country, to leave fearlessly upon the shrine of posterity the records of psychological differentiation and causes of effects, for the unborn historian who shall arise, — the barrister before the Court of Time.

Northern and Southern literatures do not exist; but American literature is rich in lore sprung from the various peoples evolved by that heredity and environment, whose duty it is to preserve pure and simple the structure of each section. Therefore, as an American citizen, under the stars of a perfected Union, the Author has no hesitancy in presenting to an American public a contribution to American literature, believing that it will be received as it is given, as a mirror of the past, bearing no more upon the future than the sunset of to-day upon the dawning of the morrow; that it will be received by the great minds of the winning side, in whom there is implicit faith, without rancor or bitterness; and when the sentiment not less true, may jar, that they will yet hear with interest the unfamiliar voice, remembering that it is the literature of "The Other Side."

THE AUTHOR.

MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE,
October, 1891.

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“THANKS BE TO GOD, THAT I TOO
AM AN AMERICAN CITIZEN!”

THE OTHER SIDE

AN HISTORIC POEM

PART FIRST

DIVERGENT LINES

ACROSS the waters of the elder world,
Upon the ancient land of lore and song,
Two foster brothers smiled in childish play,
And knelt beside an English mother's knee.
The one was gentle, and a mystic bloom
Lay on the olive cheek and dewy lip,
That mirrored in their open purity
The joyous, loving heart that beat within.
And one was grave ; the curve of youth was hid
Beneath a cloak of sternness, and the eye,
Fraught with the portent of the coming time,
Looked keen and hardened from a narrow brow
That marked the branching of the parent tree.
And so they grew, nursed by divergent themes,
Beside the ancient fountain of the race,

Until their knighthood graved upon their
shields

The legends "Cavalier" and "Puritan."

When turning from the mother heart that dealt
Unfairly with the children of her love,
The one led on by conquest's glittering train,
The other for the easing of a gall, —

Upon the borders of the western world
These brothers met, as warders of the land.
They chose, and if perchance the goodly land
That fell to Jacob's lot was fair, 't was well,
For on the bleak frontier with sturdy strength,
The iron-sinewed Esau delved and throve ;
And burning from oppression's blistering
brand,

The hot blood surging through his corded
veins,

The alien drove his flying scourge and bade
The red-skinned Ishmael seek the setting sun.
When "right divine" became a feudal wrong,
These brothers snapped the leading-strings in
twain,

And in the tangle of the newer world
They made a compact on the field of blood.

Upon the wave that swept across the sea
They poured the honest sleet of rebel ball ;
Enthroned powers trembled in their wrath,
And rage gnawed at the ermine of a king.
On high, by force of dauntless rebel will
And rebel arms, on glory parchment writ,
There flashed the white star of achievement,
flung

Upon the stirring records of the world.
The British crimson faded from the field,
Through lifting smoke, where ships go down
to sea ;
'Mid stacking arms, a lusty shout arose,
That gave a grand Republic to the world.

Full well they wrought, those fathers of the
land,
To blazon freedom on the rearing crest
Of what they dreamed, a proud posterity.
And time looked on the field and blessed the
yield
Of each with plenty, fit unto his kind,
And nature's heart to each ambition gave
The key that fits the oil'd lock of ease.
Yea, greed of gold ! — high heaped the shining
pile,

And still the itching palm stretched out for
more,
As through the years the slavers plowed the
deep,
And trafficked on the mart in human souls.
One gave the slave into his brother's hand
For glut of gold, and came and came again,
Until the dark cloud in the South eclipsed
The sense of wrong, as locusts hide the sun.
The Cavalier smiled on his ample fields,
Tilled by the sinews of the dusky race ;
The sin took root and bore an ample fruit —
His brother gave, alas ! and he did eat !
What mattered to the Puritan the cry, —
The cry of dusky children 'neath his gold ?
The silken robe remembered not the past,
The yellow balm had soothed his fretted soul.
Strange, that the clarion note of freedom slept
Throughout the years that spread the fowlers'
net,
That herded human chattels in the field,
That better bred the ill-begotten race,
Gave recompense unto that bleaker part
With that befitted to her rugged lines.
Strange, that the mutual sin had blinded eyes,

So wont to see, with clearer vision set,
Until the poison leaven in the cup
With envy's lees had blent, and yeasted o'er
In bitter, darkened curses, brewed for each.

Still westward, on and on, the weary feet
Of Ishmael pressed the dusty, rocky way, —
Now turning in the light of savage rage
To break an arrow on the heel of fate,
Then on and on, with bow unstrung, to leave
A ghost upon his happy hunting ground.
The bond, the free, both cradled by the scythe,
That garnered for the dominating race ;
The boast of dragging centuries had dawned
To see the planting of an iron heel !

Well fared the young Republic in her race,
Until men owned her prowess, and the hands
Of monarchies had clapped in her applause,
Until beside the single altar reared,
A broken oath lay sullied in the dust.
For like a vaulting bird that wheels and swoops
Upon his nest, destroying what he wrought,
Or like an angered stag that blindly turns
His antler thrusts upon his beating heart,
The Puritan had laid his daring hands

Upon the compact both had sealed in blood ;
Between the brothers' hands, if clasp they
could
Grew something harder than the grasp of love.

Slow drifting on a cloudless sky there came
A fleck not larger than an infant's hand.
Men thought it thundered, paused within the
field,
Then bent the sickle to the harvest sheaves.
But through the dancing gleam of pike and
brand
There grinned the horrid carrion of night,
That crept upon a sleeping land to breed
Foul demons in the breasts of simple slaves.
God could not lend the breath of life to
these ! —

The grim abortions stained the virgin field,
And on the cold brow of the murdered sire
Was left the imprint of another Cain.

The throat of golden eloquence had thrilled
The silver tongues of North and South in vain,
Till that great centre shook from pave to
dome, —
A Babel for the rights and wrongs of men.

And there was scoffing in that evil day,
And waggings of the wise-pates, to and fro.
What cared the Cavalier for war or arms, —
Whose storehouse burst with plenty through
 those years
That hung his idle spear upon its walls?
His sword of Revolutionary fame
Had known baptism where the plowshare
 turns ;
But what were rights ? — that share could turn
 again,
That pruning-hook leap out, a trusty blade,
When vandals marred the rare foundation
 stone
For which they fought, for which they wrought
 anew
The fabric of the governmental world.

Strife fell within the quiet tents of each, —
The gentler Jacob, yearning for his flocks,
Bade Esau let him now depart in peace
From out his coasts, nor let their verging paths
Cross oft again, nor e'er if not in peace ;
It was a just, inalienable right, —
The compact should be tested, proved if true.

But Envy, creeping from the arms of Hate,
Gave birth to blear-eyed Jealousy, and slew
Upon the very altar of her needs
The country's last born child, the soft-eyed
Faith ;
And in her stead the changeling grew and
throve,
Nor dared reveal her horrid bloated form,
But through the night fed on the sops that
cast
The shadow of the substance, brewed in hell.

What tie of blood was there to stronger hold
Than legends writ in water, oaths in sand ? —
The unbound eyes of Justice stared afar,
And wrong had tampered with the honest scale.
The war-cloud burst, the fading sun went down,
To leave a swirling bloody afterglow ;
And by the sea and through the mountain pass
There rung the changes of the reveillé.
It echoed in the halls where wealth had trod,
Where hearts had wove the tenderest chord of
life,
And in the cot where poverty and love
Had nested in the faith of God and home.

For unto each the summons came alike,
And stirred wherever spark of manhood dwelt.
They left the plowshare in the furrowed
field,

The anvil yearning for the hammer's stroke,
The downy couch of ease, the thornless path
Through fallow lands as far as eye could reach,
And tottering graybeards looked upon the sky
With shaded eye, nor read the portents there.

What mattered to the "flintlock" that the gun
Of progress waited on the hungry field,
Or alien hireling with Northern host
Opposed the cause his heart espoused for
right

With ranks outnumbering, and swelled the
troops

With those poor ebon chattels of his hand, —
Enfranchised mockeries, — held in the lines
By bayonets that prodded from the rear,
And goaded by the lash of promised gain
To spill the blood that most had been their
care!

The compact had been broken, sovereignty
Of states was scoffed at as an idle tale, —

A brother's hand was laid, a tyrant's rod,
To centralize the strength its seal diffused.
What serfs were here to wear the hated yoke
Plebeian monarchy enthroned would weld? —
Secession waved her arm, — the yell that
struck

Keen edgèd fear in aftertimes, split through
The surcharged throats, and base and nobler
born,

With one accord, struck for their God, their
South! —

They chose, and sadly from his fruitless quest
For peace, the eagle of the Southland came,
And on his crest, his People laid the seal
Of leadership, the Southland's weal or woe.

Wives gave their loves, and lovers, the be-
trothed ;

Men gave their hopes, and women gave their
trust, —

Nor ever Spartan mother gave the shield
With grander token than the Southern heart.

Yea, what a charge was there! — the wonder-
ing world

Stood still in silence, and the beating pulse

That times the arteries of nations, leaped,
Thrilled with the greatness of the civil shock !
What mattered half-starved legions, thinning
ranks, —

For valor closed the lines where valor fell,
And honor kept the hunger-wolf unseen,
Within the vitals of the Southern host.
Amid the smoke that wreathed the battle
plain,

High reached the flames that swept the lordly
homes, —

Her dwelling places then were human hearts,
And Dixie was an altar raised to God !
Ah ! would she yield ? — her valiant arm beat
back

The swelling horde that poured against her
heart.

The thinning ranks refilled, the graybeard
came,

And death gave up his own a little while ;
Then from his pillow where he dreamed, the
child

Leaped into manhood in a single night, —
The South had need of men, and childhood
died,

To leave a memory, a golden curl,
An honored name upon the roll of war, —
For even “seed corn” went to save the stalk.

So passed the years, the battle-years that wore
The star of valor, pointed with the tears
And brightened with the love that trod the
loom,

And bore the burden of the empty home.
What room for woman’s wailing when the
scream

Of shot and shell filled in each lagging
pause!

She gave her all for right, and duty bade
Her still her moan in silence, though her song
Was hymned unto the guns, and twilight blent
The cry of battle with her evening prayer.

What tribute to the serfdom of the past,
So fair, so strange, so tender true as this.
When all the Southland gave her men to war,
And left her womanhood unguarded, lone,
She trusted in her own, and looking back
Some time through lifting smoke a shadow fell
Between the danger line and tender lives, —

The bare brown shoulder of an humble shield,
The true arm of a loving, faithful slave !

Pressed on the right, encompassed round
about,

Pressed on the left, the dauntless Southland
stood

Unyielding yet, though famine hand in hand
Stalked forth with war, and seas of gleaming
spears

Broke like a surf against her wooden walls.

The fortress could not hold, the fates, new
named

Starvation, War, and Time, wore on the host ;
'The tide of strength ran out and left the bars
As gaunt as naked skeletons of death.

But one more strike for liberty, for right !

The hearts of men burst, broken with the
shock, —

The silence bled. Upon the shrine of war

The Southland laid a warrior's spotless
sword !

And Richmond, chosen daughter of her
heart, —

Could she, the mother, leave thee, leave thee
so ? —

Love laid the torch to give thee unto death,
That beauty might not glad the victor's arms !
The darkness came and dwelt, sat at the
board

With silence for a guest, and high there crept
A thousand tongues of living, leaping flame ;
Now folding like a wreathing arm of light,
Now climbing up and up until the gleam
Pled unto heaven like a golden prayer.

Ay! they were prayers !— what hecatombs of
love,

And incense crushed from bruised and bleed-
ing hearts,

And hopes all unfulfilled, heaped high the
mount

That lifted up the Southland to her God !

The morning dawned, above the smouldering
heap

They flung the Union banner to the breeze ;

But shrouded in the heart of her who loved

There gleamed the radiance of the Southern
Cross. ◆

They cried not quarter from beleaguered posts,
The ragged, starving legions waiting there,

Though rumors like as blackbirds in the
spring

Dropped thick upon the evil sprouting corn,
Half unbeliev'd. When from the sullen North,
Like blades of ice, a palsied horror fell,
Too awful yet for speech, a dragging hush
That stilled the palms upon the Southern
slope.

In all the gleaming of a thousand lights,
The maniac murderer struck, nor struck in
vain ;

Amid the throbbing of a thousand hearts
He fled, a thing of blackness, through the
night,
Adown the darkness of the sphinx-like
years,

A restless Judah, still unblest of death !

How could she know the deed was laid to her,
Who spurn'd unequal vantage in the field, —
That her unrifted night should blacker wear
Beneath the mantle of a dastard lie ?

She mourned her fallen foe as one who held
The jewel of his office to the light,

Set round, perhaps, with justice, — reft too
soon

To show the mellow hues that mercy lends.
She scorned the shallow mummer chance had
placed

Within the stately chair — whose shrunken wits
Would hang upon its arm a cap and bells,
Beside the sables of a nation's woe.

And so she mourned above the victor's shroud,
But felt a curse like flame upon her head
Pour from the frenzied tongues that wildly cut
The tie to mere humanity in twain,
As stern revenge hissed through the cry that
told

The world, the lion of the North was slain.

Oh ! beauteous Southland, — fairest of fair
lands !

Thy soul of honor gave the crime the lie
Unsought, unjustified, for though thy wreath
Was cypress, victor's bays ne'er held the dews
Of truth and right more wholly pure than
thou ! —

The hand of History pauses, and her pen
Droops o'er her scroll in sadness, but the call
Of centuries before her bids her write, —
By gleam of Truth's white burning torch, nor
 spare

The damning spot that blots the Union shield,
Whose pardoning grace can only come from
 God !

PART SECOND

THE PRISONER OF STATE

THE dogs of war within the fortress sleep,
The silent shadows drift upon its wall,
Within the moat that frets its sombre side
The sluggish tidal oozes rise and fall.

The clanging gates have shut upon the world
Where justice may have dwelt, — hope's rays
depart ;
The yearning bars grate through their rings to
hold
The iron secrets of a granite heart.

The heavy present weighs upon its own,
Nor gives a token of the deeds to be ; —
A martial cloak but hides the hand that
dropped
The sword of honor for a jailer's key.



JEFFERSON DAVIS WHEN CAPTURED.

The plumage of the eagle drips with blood,
His broken pinion droops, he cannot fly,
Nor look upon the glory of the sun,
Nor hear the hungry eaglets when they cry.

His foot may claim no resting-place on earth,
Save what the victor gave, — a muffled knell,
A sorrow crucified, that sifts the light
Of anguish through a grated prison cell.

He looks in silence on the fading moat,
A darkness comes, — he cannot see the
stars ;

The night is falling on the world he loved, —
He feels its blackness through the driven
bars.

His bearings have been lost, the captive
speaks —

The question dies, the answer is his own,
That echoes through the narrow cell to strike
A sullen mass of living, human stone.

Nor yet alone, — all through the weary day
The heavy treading of the sentries' beat, —

All through the night's unsleeping watch it
rings, —

The measured echo of the soldiers' feet.

Unheard it falls, beyond the chilling vault, —
The dwelling of a warrior's spotless shield,
The spirit of the Chieftain haunts to-night
The last sad bivouac upon the field.

The dawning wears, a somber, feeble ray
Strains through the casemate where the shadows
press ;

The prison lamp is out, the captive turns
Upon the pillow slumber could not bless.

What sorrows wait for thee, sad riven heart !
Thy cup is full of wormwood darkly blent,
Thy days are mixed with gall to drag their
length

Across the narrow span the victors lent !

The thief that waits by night the darkened
moon,

The felon, throttling life until it died,
The outcast of the earth is blameless held,
Until by light of proof his cause is tried ;

But thou? — tribunals will not hear thy voice,
And Truth swoons on the high dishonored
 stair,
While Hate holds parlance, offering to Re-
 venge, —
The Baal of the nation, worshiped there.

A key is turned, the grating hinges groan,
A shadow falls upon the prison bed,
The sentries break their measured beat and
 pause
To hear the echo of the jailer's tread.

Without, the ripened time before the earth
Has clamored of a higher, golden age ;
Within, the brutal lust for guiltless blood,
Proclaims a later Inquisition's rage.

The weary eyes are closed, — has death come
 first,
Has nature robbed the torturers of their
 prey ?
Must vengeance die upon a sheath'd sword,
And hold, unspent, its passions still at bay ? —

Life yet must linger, honor could not die,
Nor even leave the shadow of a stain ;
The strength of manhood in its purest flower,
Could not be crushed beneath a felon's chain !

Woe stirs the pulses of the broken heart,
With cruel pathos memory's fingers dwell
Upon the brain, shut in from life, from love,
From even misery, —a living hell !

The crimson bar upon the anvil cools,
The idle bellows has forgot its part ;
The brawny smith has left the blazing forge,
To ply his craft upon a human heart.

They bring the mighty sinews of the fort,
The men of strength, before the man of grief ;
Their heavy irons drag with clanking chains
The shackles for the Southland's honored
Chief.

Before his persecutors stands he there,
Brutality and honor, face to face, —
More merciful, Oh ! Death, be quick to spare
The country for all time, the dire disgrace !

Yea, he could bear it for his people's sin ;
If sin there be, his willing blood would flow —
Yet not on him alone, the shame is poured
Upon a broken people in its woe.

Alas ! the creed men wear upon the sleeve,
Man's inhumanity gives oft the lie ;
Alas ! the cycle of the golden age
Must weld an iron segment ere it die !

Can such things be, and manhood bear un-
 marred
The impress of his God ? — what heed were
 bars,
Or walls of bayonets, or prison gates,
That infamy cries out unto the stars !

There is an arm to strike, a voice to plead
For smoking flax beside the broken reed ;
Within the cell a fearful struggle dies, —
Recording angels cannot blot the deed !

The day of progress, ay, so called, of peace,
Enfolds the land, nor pauses at the gate
To look upon the manacles that bind
The welded Union's Prisoner of State.

Ay, damning spot upon the scutcheon laid !
When hate is dead, what incense can atone ?
When time, the leveler, shall stand confessed,
What heart, what tongue, the dastard deed
shall own ? —

So wear the days away, — what matter they,
Or blue of sky or plash of cooling rain, —
The change of sentries marks the passing hour,
And time is only calendared by pain.

Four narrow walls for that wide eerie sweep,
That met the eagle of the Southern plain, —
A noisome vapor for the spicy breath, —
A ceaseless grinding on the fevered brain ;

A twilight where the darkness may not fall,
A darkness where the light of peace is dead,
A dawning moated with a thousand fears,
A midnight blackened with a silent dread ;

The hideous torturing of human eyes,
Unsleeping, fixed, well schooled unto their
part, —

The gaze of serpents on the wounded life,
That gloat, yet dare not feed upon its heart.

Without, the busy world must live, must
move,

The pulse of Commerce beat within the gate ;
But still no echo filters through those walls,
Save messages of calumny and hate.

Not even Truth may come, unless in shape
Warped like a wrinkled crone, she passed her
by,

To glare across the bars, — a lower wretch
Than she who often paused, — the Naked Lie.

Humiliation, thou art here, — thy scourge
Lies on the heart that bleeds unto thy rod ;
Before thy shrine there kneels a very king,
Whose soul, unconquered, looks unto his God !

The ravening beast will prey upon his kind,
Complete the anguish that mischance began ;
The brutal hirelings can have their will, —
The part divine is slumbering in man.

They heap their tortures on the wasted frame,
Indignities with insults flaunt and vie,
To wring repentance for an imaged wrong,
To chronicle regret's unguarded sigh.

What cunning guild hath taught thy hand of
steel,

O art of cruelty, distilled, refined,
That turns the blade upon the quivering nerve
To test the limitations of the mind?

Day unto day, the weary watches wear,
But bring no signal of the coming end ;
He cannot know if on the whole wide earth
There breathes for him a whispered prayer, —
a friend !

Troops fawn upon the mantle of success,
And friendship thickens round the heaping
store ;
He sank in honor with his people's hope, —
Held he his people's faith, he asked no more.

Day unto day, — the tired senses reel,
The warders change, the sentries come and
go ;
The curse is silence, and he cannot plead
His cause unto the ear of friend or foe ;

Not his, — a blameless offering is held,
The old Hebraic altar lies within ;

The breast of manhood, free from stain, is
bared

To suffer for a people's doubtful sin.

Go to ! thou ermine of polluted Right, —
The lion's skin but hides the craven fools,
Whose pliant knees are trembling in their
haste

To glut the Union wrath, ere reason cools !

Ah ! where are they, unsullied laws of state,
Unerring, swerving not from cast or die, —
Ah ! where are they, the hidden springs that
move

The better part of all humanity ?

Is this a murderer in durance held,
A wily traitor to his torture sent,
A deep dyed criminal, to bear the weight
Of weary days in silent anguish spent ?

These may be heard ; benignity awakes
To bid each speak for justice soon or late ;
All may be heard, save he untouched of
crime, —

The welded Union's Prisoner of State.

Where else the brave tribunal that would hold
The body in a prison cell aloof,
Upon a questioned charge, and shirk the test,
The trial that would clear, or make the proof! —

Ay, one. Upon a festal Jewish eve
They loosed Barabbas from the prison walls,
For One all blameless. Buried visions wake
Within the solemn gloom of Pilate's halls.

But only echoes come ; tides rise and fall,
And trees are swaying in the sighing wind :
Forgiveness comes to some, — these lips are
dumb ;
He only asks for pardon who has sinned.

Thy crime, Oh ! hapless Prisoner of State,
Is that thy people chose thee for their head !
Oh ! manhood of the South, if thou hast plead,
He knows thy pardon was the cry for bread !

The seasons bring their changes, vernal bloom
Has dropped its beauty for the cloth of gold ;
The fortress minstrels don the southern
plume, —
He marks the season by the coming cold.

How press the goads upon the anguished frame,
On soul and sinew cut the torturing bands ;
The staff of life, the very prison bread
Is shredded through a brutal soldier's hands ;

The humble implements of humbler life
For humblest food, his torturers deny,
Lest by his hand upon the homely blade,
In black despair, the frenzied captive die ;

For he had courted death before the guns
Of angered guards before the fateful deed ;
He should not die in peace and leave un-
drained
The bitter cup, his captors deemed his meed.

Yet they who hold an early death too kind,
Know not the manhood that they seek to
rend, —
Starvation mocks, the thin lips cannot beg, —
The soul God gave him was not born to bend !

He deems the vital spark a thing divine,
E'en when the face of death is sweeter far
To man than life, — his prowess cannot give, —
He may not enter where the holies are.

One came to him with healing balm, a foe, —
Humanity to man, an aid would lend ;
And manhood knew his kind, though far
 apart
And hedged about, he dared to be a friend.

When fever surges through the wasted form,
And phantasies play on the storm-racked heart,
What alchemy can mix the draught of peace,
What physic holds the crucible of art !

The great soul wanders out upon the world,
Upon the world he loved, whose woe he
 bears,
Along the grave clods of dismantled loves,
Of broken shrines, of bitter, silent tears.

There is no bolt to bind, nor lock to bar ;
How fare his people 'neath the Union wing ?
Unfeathered promises, that yet will moult
Unplumed, before the coming of the spring !

How fare his own ? — the proud ancestral
 palm
Stands scorched upon the plain where sleep
 the dead,

Where nest his own young eaglets in the gloom
That stifles with the pride-hushed cry for
bread !

Alas ! that wandering spirit cannot speak,
Whose cloak lies wasting in a guarded cell,
Unblessed, save by the Higher Hand for
death, —
Unheard, unjustified, if life should dwell.

What matter for the body ? — feeble thing,
That barely holds the greatness in its
bounds, —
What sophistries, earth wove or spun of hell,
Can drink the poison from these rankling
wounds !

To die ? — the human eyes gaze from their
lair, —

'T were sweet to miss the converse of the
glance,

To feel the watch of life beat out its spring,
To drift, — into the light of peace, perchance ;

To lose the tread of sentries in the hush
That comes to lull the weary pulse to rest, —

To close the fluttering lids upon the world,
To sleep, upon the old Earth-Mother's breast.

To die, — ah ! what is death ? — the earth to
earth,
The lowly blending with the primal sod,
Unbinding all the cords that fret the hope
That looks through faith, in darkness, up to
God ;

To strip the soul of every earthly veil,
To loose the unknown something from its
bond,
To leave a moveless silence in the clay,
To feel, to know, there is a life beyond !

Then come, still kindly Death, reverse the
torch,
For Thou, ah ! God, Thou knowest what he
bears !
He cannot quench Thy light, but fed by woe
The feeble flame deep in the socket wears !

To die, — with silence on those fevered lips,
What heart shall know, what clarion tongue
shall tell, —

When they shall flaunt their charges, who shall
speak?

To die unheard, — within a prison cell.

They seal that being from the outer world,
Whose voice is mute, whose shattered life a
thread ;

When shame at last shall draw the iron bars,
Shall they, too late, but look upon the dead ?

Dead, with a shadow on the honored name ;
More harmful yet, the vague and skulking
doubt,

That enters through a crevice with the wind,
While sober judgment stands and waits with-
out?

Men have been crucified, have died for hate,
Hearts have been broken on the racking wheel ;
A nation's thrice-blessed chalice never washed
Oppression's memories from her guilty heel !

Then let the trial come, the cause be heard,
Or let the curse drag on from sun to sun ! —
The weary prisoner turns upon his bed, —
“ My Father, I would live, — Thy will be done ! ”

So weaves the raveled thread of somber life,
That in the changing light, faith knits with care
For him who looks up through the clouds of
earth
Beyond the bars, and feels a Presence there.

The springtime dallies with the ragged hem
That binds the snowy robe of sleeping earth ;
Yet once again her broideries break through
The dark cold clods, that yearned to give them
birth.

Within the fort are whisperings of life,
And in the tender green of new-born leaves,
The feathered wanderers have dropped the
wing,
And swallows twitter in the drying eaves ;

Like incense sifting through the prison bars,
Like prayers, the trusting music breathes afar
The worship of the Unknown Love that taught
The tiny things what love and freedom are.

Yea, such as these, — a thing that man may
hold
Within the roomy hollow of his palm,

Will break the tiny wing within a snare,
Will pine for freedom, in a prison's calm ;

Oh ! Hand that counts the strands of human life
Like beads upon the shadow of His thought ! —
To lie upon the sluggish tide that tells
The turn of time, where days, where years are
naught ! —

How goes the day, the wistful day that laid
The sad year dead, upon the leaves of fate?
What message drifts upon the heavy gloom
That lies around the Prisoner of State ?

Peace cannot tell the old familiar tale,
Hearts cannot speak the sympathy they feel ;
Oh ! love, thy voice is hushed, and friendship
weeps,
Blocked out by granite, barred by glittering
steel !

The hand that led the flower of the world,
Whose fingers, chivalry was wont to press,
Wooes with a crumb, a timid starving mouse,—
The only thing he has the power to bless !

Across the moat the sunbeams drift and die,
Beneath the frowning turrets, shadows blend,
Are born and die again with dreary rote ;
The sickened senses swim, — when comes the
end !

The hand of Nature heals the war-scarred earth,
She nestles close unto the mother's heart,
To feel its beating, while her human sons
In din and strife, forget that better part.

For whence the force that seals the captive's
cell, —
What power wields the key that bars the
gate ?
Dwells he beneath the rules of martial sway,
Or by the ancient civil laws of state ?

The martial bond dies with the pulse of war,
Then whence the charge, Oh ! learned court of
Truth ? —
The civil law had sent the baser crimes
Upon a speedier road than this, forsooth !

Had there been dealt by stealth a secret blow,
A traitorous hand, a traitor's fate had met ;

A murderer's heart had justly ceased to beat,
A prison-torturer's sun had long been set !

Yea, what a spectacle is this, to leave
Upon the record of a vaunted peace —
A prisoner, held by government, ashamed
To grant a trial or to give release !

And should he die beneath the bonds of hate,
Through riven bars shall they look on the
 dead,
Then hiss into the ear of listening worlds
The Jewish cry, " His blood be on our head " ?

His code is cast within a higher mould,
That asks not mercy, at the victor's hand —
Before a civil court he only craves
An open trial of his native land.

The issue clogs the progress of the wheels
That lead the triumph of the Union cause ;
Before the seat where reigns unholy wrath,
The scions of humanity must pause,

To hear the voices calling from the waste
Where Justice left her mantle ere she fled ;

The pleading for the smothered spark of right,
Lest honest right of fearless truth be dead.

It is a sun-gleam, shot across the cloud, —
Born where the human fountain ebbs and flows,
The fealty of manhood unto man,
Pledged with the open hands of noble foes.

The ears waxed dull against the boom of war,
The treason-criers with their garments rent,
And balanced reason yet must hear the call —
The clarion that humanity has sent !

Two weary years ! The heavy prison gates
Swing on their laggard hinges once again,
The breath of heaven mingles with the earth,
The light of heaven mingles with the pain !

And still the spawn of undiluted hate
And craven shame, upon the vantage grope, —
When sons of wrath have gulped envenomed
gall,
To vaunt the “ clemency that spared the rope.”

Two weary years ! the proud head of the Chief,
Unbowed in chains, unbent in wasting care,

Droops in the silent faith with her who waits, —
The light of love is more than he can bear ;

Whose voice is dead within a living world,
Ambition's feather broken on its glave,
The future, but the cypress-trailing past, —
Not even his, the franchise of a slave !

PART THIRD

RECONSTRUCTION

THEY turned their faces from the sullen field,
Where time had writ defeat with bloody hand ;
The grave had claimed its own, and prison
holes

Had vomited their ghastly wrecks of life.
Unconquered men ! — who held the coat of
gray

In rags and honor o'er the Southern heart,
That struck for right, outstripped by force, for
death —

Unblessed by both, to teach how manhood
lives !

They told their stories by the broken hearth,
By empty chairs, by boards with sorrow
spread,

Where two or three had gathered in the name,
And paused within a prayer, to call it 'Home.'

The calm had kissed the storm, the twilight
hush

Had pressed the burning heels of noontide
glare, —

But what a calm was there, its stillness
· drooped

Before the horrors of a blank despair !

They came from far along the dusty way

To seek their own, — to find the husks of life :

Graves sorrow-filled, to soothe a yearning love,

And dreary wastes where torch of wrath had
dwelt.

Men pressed the teeth into the lip, nor spake,

But strained their sinews to the biting need

That fed upon the wasting chords of life ;

Plaints died unuttered, empty words were
vain, —

For such before the ear of God were dumb.

Some fell beneath the awful car that strewed

The hearts of men along the way of life, —

Souls paused amid the chaos, and the light

Of reason fled before the wrecks of love ;

Death slipped beneath the arms and sorrow
slept

Upon his bosom like a cradled child.

And some there were, a few, oh ! bitter shame !
Who in the darkness turned the coat of gray, —
Its ragged honors must have hardly pressed
To give its lining such a sheen of blue !

To some a silence came, and sorrow supped
With tears and sorrow ; watching eyes grew dim
With gazing down familiar paths in vain.
And then a sword or whispered message came
And Rachael lifted up her voice and wept ;
To turn again to earnest life alone,
Beneath the sackcloth and the ash of woe,
To stifle back the mother-cry that left
Her patriots on the field of honor, dead.
The sword was hung above the scanty board,
Was hung in honor, crossed with that which
gave
The birth throe of Republics, — blade with
blade
Bore silent witness of a common cause ;
For truth has lived, will live, a thing of God,
Though human strength falls quivering by the
way ;
The flames consume not, nor the blight that
drops
A weaker fruit untimely to the earth !

While yet, the goodly land the fathers gave
Tossed thorn and hedgerow, waiting for the
touch

Of loving hands and hearts, to sow and reap
A fairer harvest than of shot and shell.

What time for idle grief when barn and store
Yearned with the bowels of an empty depth,
And wide-eyed children played upon the heart
And lifted up their orphaned cries of woe ?

Ay, women weep when poignant griefs bear
hard, —

The hand of Him men love hath made them so ;
But ah ! that line that held those starving
throats

In silence, charged before the fearful odds
In clash of war, in aftertimes revealed
The ease, endurance works through living
pain !

Men called it peace. Arbitrament of war
Had held the Southland in the Union league
With stern decree, lest even right should break
The link that bound the welded sisterhood.
She bowed her head to fate, and in the night
That lay upon her heart, footsore and sad,

Before the Union's citadel of might
She pressed unto the brazen door and knocked ;
Men heard her not, a chaos reigned within,
Nor opened unto amnesty and right.
"Peace hath her victories no less than war."
Peace hath her shames — ah ! pitiful the word
That heaped the blackness of unnumbered
 crimes
Upon the devastation of the sword !

Wide lay the lines between the heated hearts,
Not wider they, when fratricidal war
Plowed with a bloody scythe the teeming fields ;
The olive branch of Reconstruction came, —
A cursed leaf upon a blighted trunk !
Ay, peace forsooth ! along her barren land,
That yielded up its store to flame and sword,
She wound her silent way with folded hands ;
What more for her ? — her wonted eloquence
Was hushed amid the governmental world,
Her arm of might was severed from its power,
And alien robes swept through her halls of
 state !

Hast seen the birds that sentry on the beach,
Upon the calm that follows on the storm ?

Hast seen the human ghoulds with net and
snare,

Who ply their craft along the cruel bars ?

For so they came, the warriors of peace,

To sniff the harmless aftermath of strife,

Clothed in the little brief unwonted power,

That gives a beggar airing for his rags ;

Unburdened, save by hate, that strove to fill

The long lean cavern of an empty pouch.

So grew the loathsome cloud from out the

North,

Along the low horizon of the South, —

The swaying buzzard hath not surer flight

Than that which swooped upon the wrecks of

war.

What wonder men grew pale and ground the

teeth

In sullen silence, bending to their tasks,

Or soft-eyed women, toiling at the wheel,

Wept low that even sunlight had grown dim !

From fleecy fields the “Wards of Freedom”
came

With thick-lipped clamor, waving in their
hands,

With blatant ignorance and vicious lusts,
The franchise that the Southron could not
use.

Full loud the grotesque clamor rose and fell
Unheeded, by a promise unfulfilled ;
What gift of office could appease the hope
That held a goodly Canaan and a mule !
But even they, the children of the night,
Must fill a hungry maw that yearned for more ;
From dusky hands, in childish trust, there
slipped
A piteous hoard to feed unholy greed !

Some preached of love, from altars hedged
about,
Far from the scene, nor pondered what they
taught, —
Where blank-eyed dreamers, wild with theories,
Hugged not the truth, but images brain-
wrought.
Some bridged the gulf, but from coercion
hewed
The keystone of the arch set in with blood,
Flanked by the glittering bars of bayonets,
That held their sharpness by a brutal might.

Blight followed blight ; the dark insensate
ground

Was cold beneath the chilling drops of war,
Nor freely gave its multiplying power
Into the hands whose harvest had been death.
Had He, who in the fullness of His word
Holds all within the hollow of His hand,
Forgot to look upon the evil days
Heaped up with labor, running o'er with
prayers ?

Her lines were hard, but still the Southland held
Her faith unshaken, and her trust undimmed
Against foul slander, calumny, and wrong,—
The very vipers warming at her hearth, —
To lend a still tongue and a muffled ear
To all the shallow comforters of Job
Who perched upon the ruin of her walls
To crave a curse upon the evil time.

Her land of dreams had died upon her heart,
As daring, pure, as palaces of snow,
To leave as residue that hallowed thing,
Unconquered, in the history of man, —
That dwelt upon the vanquished ones who
warred

In truth for her, and by the holy dead
Took up again the tangled skein of life.
It lived, within a bruised and roughened husk,
So small and still, imprisoned in the dark,
Then on the weary, germinating years
It burst, a giant from a mustard-seed.
God smiled in sunlight, and the sodden earth
Gave back to loving care, a loving yield,
As fleecy fields tossed white with Southern
snow,
And golden fruitage bent with breaking trees.
Upon the fair land, vandal-swept, where
stalked
A hungered poverty among her brood,
There rose the white wing of a living hope
Above the ashes of her buried love.
Hill called to hill, and hidden treasure yawned
To give into her hand a heaping store,
And high against a storm-washed sky she
raised
The tower of her covenant of faith.
The empty hands were filled, and meager forms
Basked in the pleasant warmth of self-wrought
ease,
As resurrection rent the pallid veil

That lay upon the dearth of stunted years.
Progression spake, and from wide throated
 vaults
There poured a mellow stream of Northern
 gold,
Though malcontents were grumbling in their
 mood,
That God had made a Nazareth so fair.

Peace lay upon her ways, and pleasant herbs
Sprung in the furrow plowed by shot and shell,
Though o'er the land that held the Southern
 Cross,
The waving banner of the Union fell ;
Hers too, to smite a stern reality,
Hers too, abiding through the coming time, —
Whose fair allegiance, not less true, reveals
The symbol of an unforgotten dream !

Like as a mother, when the day is done,
Turns from the tiny forms she hushed to rest,
So tender, yet so faithful in her love, —
To weep upon a treasured golden curl,
Or faded shoe a buried baby wore, —
Not yet a part, and yet a tie to waft

The incense of the holy risen thing, —
On each returning springtime o'er her Cross
The widowed South remembered, wept her
 dead ;
To smile again upon the living hearts
That looked their love into her faithful eyes,
To draw her mantle o'er the holy place
Where slept the emblem of her living dead.

Blest ashes ! — keep the dust the mother loves,
As she in solemn grandeur keeps their
 shields, —
The dead who died with victory in their ears,
Who never knew their daring issue failed !
Rest lightly as a curtain spun of mist, —
Let no rude zephyr tell the story there, —
Unto the dead whom all the world has
 crowned,
Who never felt the woe the vanquished feel !

Years dropped away, the busy quiet days
Wore slanted shadows, and the first light snow
Lay on the boyish brows of Sixty One ;
They told their sons of war, and in the hush
They pointed to the dusty, vacant chairs,

Then to the grassy slopes beneath the trees,
Where rest in silence all the hills of God ;
And childish eyes grew wide and childish
 hearts

Quaffed deep the living principle they taught.
The page of life repeats as cycles close,
And from the selfsame missal it was learned,
Full lettered out, the same old simple creed
The fathers of the Revolution held.

True, tender, loving, proud old South ! — the
 hands

That rent their palms against the barb of war
To gild thy name, have woven for thy form
A wondrous garment in a magic loom.
Thou art the “New” unto the stranger’s
 glance,

Thou art the “New” unto the stranger’s clasp
That never knew thine in the olden day.
But they, Oh ! mother, who have knelt with thee,
Have lain upon thy heart to breathe their woe,
When manhood left its all upon the field
Save that undimmed honor of its shield, —
Look through the vestments of thy newer day,
Upon thy placid, dear familiar face !

Beside the sea the vista had grown gray,
The long moss trembled from the gnarlèd trees
To swell of sighing pines, that blent with
 shades

That fold about the eventide of life.
There had been woeful sacrifice of blood,
There had been offering without the death ;
Upon the altar of a people's love
A Chief's unsullied broken life was laid ;
Atonement for the living, for the dead,
A requiem for the cause that lived and died, —
A shrine to bear a weak one's conscious sin,
If craven hand be found to cast it there.
An alien in the land that gave him birth,
Without a pardon, either asked or given,
A severed chord yet vibrant in its strength,
A silence, when the thunder peal is stilled.
He lived, — unbent before the stricken years,
Cut like a granite form against the gray,
To nourish in his heart the flawless germ
Of life, the riven Constitution lost.
He lived, — the target of a thousand shafts, —
A sentinel above the grave of hope,
The substance of a disembodied dream, —
A living, bleeding sacrifice for men !

The dreams of youth drift when the frosty
years

Leave snowflakes in the locks that manhood
brought ;

Somewhere upon the path, the ghost of bloom
Will mingle with the mellowed autumn leaf.

The issue failed, — its following was want,
The cry for bread had stilled the voice of men.
The present need beat back the bloody past
Within the darkness, but what time the feet
Were loosed from treading corn, the silent
hearts

Turned back in faith unto their early love.

The newer day was theirs ; upon the form
They followed, loved, the night was falling fast,
And with the throbbing of a million loves
The war-scarred Southrons sought again their
Chief.

But once again ! the loyalty they gave
But slumbered through the five and twenty
years, —

But once again ! ere grandeur slept with age
Beside the starry banner in its shroud !
T' was meet — through life he suffered death
for them,

For them he gave the flower of his years
To leave its perfume in an iron hand,
Its petals dead, and yet he murmured not.
And so they came as soldiers once again,
Came with the autumn glory as it smiled
Upon the frost-touched heads, half sorrow
crowned,

To blend the tokens of a living love.
From every walk of life, with martial tread,
In tender mood they wound their thoughtful
way.

To cast a joy into the cup of pain,
A gleam against the years of sleet and rain.
Ay, stood he there ! the eagle of the South,
Old, gray, beneath the chains of fettered years,
Alone and grand against a changing sky, —
A sunset of a glorious day that died !

They looked upon the wasted form they loved ;
Hearts broke the clod of weary buried time ;
A rush of soul — Oh ! God ! if it were sin,
That all Thy faithful had such following !
Ah ! what was time ? a filmy veil that swept
Like spiders' webs before the seething flood !
Ah ! what was life ? a single drop to pour
Within the precious chalice of the past !

The martial line was broken, far above
A shout clave through the sympathetic air ;
Heart called to heart, that echoed back again
Through bursting throats a swelling sea of
 sound.

On, on, they came, what mattered form or
 state ?

The day had cheated age, the hearts were
 young

To lift the tender glory of the past,
To press like children to the Chieftain's feet.
All, all forgot ! ay, but to see his face,
To hear his voice, to touch his withered hands,
To look into the eagle eye, that looked
Its last, through glistening tears, upon his own !
They struggled, surged, a breaking wave of
 hearts,

Swept by a backing tide of memory, —
To rain their kisses on the thin pale hands
And wash them with the strength of manhood's
 tears.

All, all were there — the faithful in the dark,
The steadfast armorers, and e'en the sons
That strayed apart, came back in earnest troth
To look upon the emblem of their love.

What hand could check ? from human hearts
it flashed

As sudden lightning rends the cloudless skies,
A joy that filtered through an age of woe,
A candle snuffed to radiance as it dies !

And scoff who might, the sordid day had
paused,

The mystic triumph sped from soul to soul ;
High heaven's angels looked into their depths
And marked its passage with a spotless stone !

They raised the tatters of the Southern Cross,
With trembling hands above the weeping host,
The Chieftain bowed upon its bloodstained
folds —

The living emblem and the dead were one !
The last farewell ! above his People crowned
With sunlit peace, he waved the tattered thing,—
Like to his breaking heart, the tie that bound
Their lives, their glories, with the deathless past ;

A shout, a prayer, a benediction died
Upon the shadow of the glorious dream, —
A silence drifted like a snowy veil,
And left a Grandeur on the heart of Time !

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